



Pentecost 2009

Views from

the hermitage

Creating an environment of attentiveness to God

Annual Report: Once Upon a Time

The theme for the Annual Gathering of the Indiana-Michigan Conference of the Mennonite Church is "Once Upon a Time: Signs and Wonderings." This report was prepared for that event in keeping with the theme.

The words, "once upon a time," are full of wonder and possibility. First because they place us in time—one segment of a storied eternity. Time is the principle container of God's grace. Scripture says that in the beginning, God called forth light and God saw that the light was good. "There was evening and there was morning, the first day." All that comes after the light is measured by its rhythm. "After a *long time*...God heard [the] groaning [of the Israelites]...and God took notice of them," and led them out of slavery in Egypt. "When *the time was right*," the apostle reminds us, "God sent forth his Son, born of a virgin." This is the saga of God at work in the world.

Second, the words "once upon a time" let us in on the secret of the timeless *now*. While not promising that the story is precisely our story or in our "time," these words lead us to expect that there is a story and that we are invited "onto" the time of the story as observers if not co-participants. It could be now because we are welcomed into the story. The story could also be about us because it is about characters that may live, in truth, in each of us.

These four words open up all the possibilities that story can bring. They function for us the same way as a regular practice of prayer. Prayer opens us up to the wonders and possibilities of God at work in the world. Because prayer is conversation, we can both listen in on what God is

doing and participate in the work of God by sharing our selves with the active God. We are invited into God's project and are changed by the encounter. But recognizing the changes we experience due to our contact with the Divine sometimes eludes us. We sense something is different but we have no words for our experience or there is no context for expressing the "newness" we feel. So, we can live as if nothing has transpired and suppress the change in favor of what seems "real." Jesus recognized this possibility when inviting his hearers to have "ears that hear."

Our delight, at The Hermitage, is to walk with prayers through these changes, noticing what is new and encouraging the development of our "hearing" ears as we journey toward God. We encourage the experience even if there are no words. We rejoice in what God brings about in each "now" that the prayer enters. We have walked with over 600 prayers in the last year. Our daily rhythm of Morning Prayer and simple nutritious meals at a common table provides the framework for us to live our discipleship together. Each person who prays here contributes to the work of The Hermitage and lends a presence to the next guest.

We are embarking on a renewal project for our main building, St. Joseph's Barn, which has served guests for over 20 years. The Barn needs a new roof and replacement siding as well as some interior sprucing to continue serving our guests. Our dream is to also complete an unfinished room, creating another apartment where long-term guests or volunteers can stay. We are

currently raising funds to complete these projects.

God continues to provide funds for daily operations through our guests and other generous supporters. Living into the truth that “what is provided is what is needed” means that we continue to assess our “needs” through the filter of what we have been given. Faithfulness to this lifestyle makes living through economic uncertainty a joyful exercise. We continually ask the question, “What do we have?” rather than “What do we need?” We are amazed by the providence of God. We are grateful for each one of you who have prayed, experienced, given to or thought of The Hermitage over the last year.

Once upon a time, there was a dream to provide a way and a place of prayer in Southwest Michigan. And we are here, joyfully living the dream. You are welcome to share it with us.

-Naomi R. Wenger



Phoenix Gallery

During the month of May, we have been enjoying the “Gentle Sunsets of Three Rivers, Michigan” by Larry-Michael Hackenberg, a local watercolor artist. The Gallery will be vacant for the summer months during the construction and sabbatical periods. However, we will be inviting new artists to exhibit in the fall. Check the web-site in September for our next exhibit.

Taizé Evensong Cancelled for Summer

Taizé Evensong is cancelled for June, July and August. Please rejoin us in September for “Second Sundays at Seven Evensong.” September 13, 7:00 pm.

Buy-A-Board for the Barn

The winter’s melt and spring rains have made it clear to us about how to proceed with the scheduled renewal of St. Joseph’s Barn this summer. We must begin with the roof. To date, the \$11,500 given toward the capital improvement campaign together with pledges is enough to replace the roof and the broken skylight windows of St. Joseph’s Barn.

After the roof is replaced we hope to repair the siding of St. Joseph’s Barn. We will keep what we can of the original siding, replacing only the split, rotted and hole pocked boards that are no longer weather-proof. Our estimate is that we will need at least 100 sixteen-foot cedar boards for the repairs. When labor costs are added we expect to pay approximately \$100 per board. However, once the roof is paid for, we have no funds to begin this project. **Can you help by buying a board for the barn?** Will you collaborate with others in your faith community, prayer group, or circle of friends to buy a board or boards for the barn? Thank you for walking with us as we attend to the facility needs of The Hermitage. Please use the enclosed envelope to respond to this request.

-David Wenger

Volunteer Coordinator Job Description

The board has finalized a job description for a Volunteer Coordinator at The Hermitage. The position will be filled by a volunteer who is eager to assist in the mission of The Hermitage. If you are interested in the position, contact: David Wenger, 269-244-8696, or thehermitage@juno.com after September 1 for more information or for the complete job description.

Prayer for World Peace

Join us on **Sunday, September 20 from 5-8 pm** to continue our tradition of praying for peace on the UN Day of Prayer for World Peace. A light meal will be provided. The evening will end with a candle-light vigil.

Summer Sabbatical

While the Wengers are on sabbatical, from June 1 through August 31, volunteer directors will be here each month to serve Hermitage guests. Our June directors are Hermitage founding directors, *Gene and Mary Herr* of Newton, KS. The July directors, *Richard and Rosella Schrock* of Garden City, MO, are returning for a third term of service. The August directing team is *Kevin and June Mears Driedger* of Lansing, MI continuing their 10-year service tradition at The Hermitage.

Summer Events

Evening Reflections

Gene and Mary Herr will offer guided discussions on Wednesdays in June. These short topical or book studies are open to anyone. Reflections begin at 7:00 pm in the Ken Hanby Center. Donations accepted.

- **June 3**—*The Shack* by William Young
- **June 10**—*Crazybusy* by Edward M. Hallowell
- **June 17**—“Prayer and Depression”
- **June 24**—“Our Affirmations Are Our Identity”

“The Call of the Poor and the Paradigm of Mother Teresa” A Silent Retreat

Saturday, June 20 9:30–3:30

Jesus’ words, “I was ___ and you ___” (Matthew 25:31-46) challenge us to examine our life’s calling. We will use *Mother Teresa: A Simple Path* as a resource. Suggested donation: \$20, includes lunch. Contact the Hermitage, 269-244-8696 or thehermitage@juno.com for more information about these events.

Hermitage Jam

It’s happening on *Friday, August 7* from 8-4. Plan on coming to a berry-picking fest when we pick all the blackberries we can and turn them into jam. The day begins with Morning Prayer at 8:00 am. We recommend you wear long pants, long sleeves and closed-toe shoes for

The Hermitage Calendar

- Apr 27-May 30 Phoenix Gallery—
Larry-Michael Hackenberg
- Jun 1-Aug 31 Wenger Sabbatical
- Jun 3 *Evening Reflection*—Gene and Mary Herr, facilitators
- Jun 10 *Evening Reflection*—Gene and Mary Herr, facilitators
- Jun 17 *Evening Reflection*—Gene and Mary Herr, facilitators
- June 20 “*The Call of the Poor and ... Mother Teresa*,” 9:30-3:30
Gene and Mary Herr, facilitators
- Jun 24 *Evening Reflection*—Gene and Mary Herr, facilitators
- Aug 7 Hermitage JAM—8-4
- Aug 8 *Feast of the Transfiguration*—
Marlene Kropf, facilitator; 9-4
- Aug 9 Taizé Evensong, 7:00 pm
- Sep 13 Taizé Evensong, 7:00 pm
- Sep 20 Prayer for Peace, 5-8:00 pm

this “prickly” job. Other work projects may also be done. Lunch will be provided.

Feast of the Transfiguration Retreat: “Drinking from Light”

The annual retreat on the Feast of the Transfiguration will be led by long-time friend of The Hermitage, Marlene Kropf. Join us from 9-4, *Saturday, August 8* for a guided retreat following the theme, “Drinking from Light.”

The day will include Morning Prayer, a prayer walk around the grounds, reflection on the theme with Marlene, a festive lunch and will conclude with a celebration of Communion. Contact The Hermitage to register for this retreat. Guests are welcome to stay overnight before or after this day. Donations welcome for overnight stay.



the hermitage

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**Taizé Services: Second Sundays at Seven CANCELLED for the Summer.
Join us in September!**

The Word Alone

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.

It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for God gives sleep to his beloved.

Psalm 127: 1-2

the hermitage Mission

As Jesus was revitalized for being about his Father's business by periodic withdrawal to retreat and prayer, so The Hermitage seeks in its mission:

- *To be a prayer community, available as a place of spiritual formation where scripture, silence, nature, group experiences, and personal companionship are cultivated elements of retreat.*
- *To provide a guesthouse away from daily tasks where pastors and other pilgrims can deepen their call and relationship with God, be refreshed in their whole person and be revitalized by the presence and promise of Christ.*

(from The Hermitage Rule)

Resident Community: David & Naomi Wenger, *co-directors*

Board of Directors: Mary Asmonga-Knapp, Allan Martling (chair), Natala Mohl, Cheryl Nakata, Biff Weidman, David Wenger, Naomi Wenger